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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000227

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: ANAMBRA STATE ELECTIONS: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR
LIKELY TO BE THE NEXT GOVERNOR

REF: 06 LAGOS 1292

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A visit by Poloffs to Anambra State on March 6 showed the political scene remains volatile but People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate and Special Presidential Advisor Andy Uba has the upper hand in the race for the gubernatorial ticket. To bolster his chances, he likely has been behind the effort to disqualify his two most formidable opponents, Action Congress (AC) candidate and former Governor Chris Ngige and Governor Peter Obi of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). Nevertheless, Anambra remains unpredictable. Uba and his younger brother Chris have initiated a tough brand of political behavior which they might no longer monopolize and which could lead to unrest and violence in the State as the elections approach. End summary.

Visit to Anambra

¶2. (U) On March 6, Poloff visited Awka, the capital of Anambra State. Home of the late Igbo leader Nnamdi Azikiwe, All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) presidential candidate Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, and the novelist Chinua Achebe, Anambra has always been politically active and a bellwether of politics in the Southeast.

APGA's Unhappy Interlude in Power

¶3. (C) Governor Peter Obi of APGA gained sympathy when he fought for three years, from 2003 to 2006, to obtain the mandate taken from him by election rigging. In 2006, the Courts finally agreed with Obi, giving him the coveted gubernatorial seat. Obi had grand ideas to improve the State. Obi, the former Chairman of Fidelity Bank, attracted

the interest of the World Bank and international development organizations. However, Vanguard correspondent Anayo Okoni told Poloff while Obi had "good and very noble ideas", he proved to be an aloof and awkward politician. Moreover, he declined to distribute patronage as liberally as had been the custom. Obi's popularity slipped with some Anambrans and as supporters in his own party, who would have benefited from any largesse with state funds, became disenchanted. According to Okoni, Obi is still popular in churches and with the populace.

¶4. (C) Upon Obi's ascension, Chris Uba began to undermine his administration by stoking violence in parts of the State.

Uba's aim was to discredit Obi and thus pave the way for older brother Andy. But when Chris schemed to become Governor himself, Andy foiled his brother's plan and Chris fled to Enugu, according to Action Congress (AC) Chairman Ndubisi Nwobu. The State Assembly's subsequent impeachment of Obi in October paralyzed Anambra for weeks, Okoni said.

¶5. (C) Deputy Governor Virginia Etiaba stepped in to the governorship post in November, but was a political neophyte and rumored to be an ally of Uba although she was in APGA. Etiaba, a former schoolmaster at a prestigious private school, let her two sons, both attorneys, run the State, Okoni said. Etiaba, in her brief tenure, became subject to controversy when she tried to endear herself to the State Assembly by approving the purchase of Peugeot cars for each Anambra legislator. Etiaba defended her action by claiming that Obi approved the purchase before his impeachment; but Obi insisted he never consented to the purchase. Observers suspected the Peugeot cars were Etiaba's reward to the legislators for impeaching Obi, Okoni said. (Comment: Etiaba and her two sons were also accused of signing and padding a significant number of government contracts during her rather brief tenure. End comment.)

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¶6. (U) Upon his reinstatement in February, Obi petitioned the courts to cancel the Anambra gubernatorial election because, under the constitution he was entitled to serve a four-year term but had only served several months. Hedging his bet on the court case, APGA has allowed Obi to take Etiaba's place on the Anambra gubernatorial ballot. So far INEC has disapproved the replacement of Etiaba with Obi.

Uba Campaigns as a Good Guy Politician

¶7. (C) Okoni told Poloff that most Anambrans are apathetic to Uba. While Andy's brother Chris has a notorious reputation in the State, Andy is known because of his closeness to President Obasanjo but is considered somewhat of an outsider to Anambra internal politics, Okoni said. Uba never spent much time in Anambra, but in the past few months has made a public effort to alter his image. Uba has campaigned all over the State, demonstrating power and pomp in particular during his visits to the remote villages. Although this may be difficult for veteran political observers to believe, Okoni told Poloff, Uba has come across as a "genuinely nice guy".

¶8. (C) Executive Director for the Advancement of Democracy and the Rule of Law Osita Ogbu told Poloff that people have no passion for Uba but are supporting him because they assume he will win. According to Ogbu, Uba faked his curriculum vitae and lied about his PhD and university degree from Canada. (Comment: Uba is backed by many prominent friends. His campaign is being financed by some of Nigeria's top bankers, businessmen and current People's Democratic Party (PDP) governors. End comment.)

Uba Uses INEC to Disqualify Main Opponents

¶9. (C) Despite Uba's efforts, Okoni predicted either Obi or AC candidate and former Governor Chris Ngige would win in a free and fair election. However, neither may have the chance to prove their electoral mettle. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) disqualified both Obi and Ngige. The opposition, noting that Uba originally recommended Maurice Iwu to President Obasanjo as INEC Chairman, has alleged the presidency is using INEC to clear the pathway for Uba. Okoni told Poloff that Iwu and the National INEC are deciding whom to disqualify in Anambra. The Anambra INEC Resident Commissioner only collects documents and sends them to Abuja, Okoni said.

APGA in Disarray, as Old Feuds Fester

¶10. (C) When Poloff asked about the factions within APGA, Okoni said the PDP is backing Chekwas Okorie faction's appeal of the court decision that previously recognized the Victor Umeh faction as the legitimate APGA. Okoni speculated that while the PDP was trying to weaken APGA since it viewed APGA, a predominantly Igbo party, as the most formidable threat.

¶11. (C) Okoni predicted the elections in Anambra would not be free and fair. Even if Obi and Ngige cannot run, All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) candidate Nicholas Ukachukwu has a significant constituency, Okoni told Poloff. (Note: On March 10, INEC even excluded Ukachukwu from its list of candidates, for the time being giving Uba a situation that comes as close to an uncontested election as one can set. However, Ukachukwu obtained a Federal High Court order mandating his inclusion. The case remains in the courts. End note.) Okoni said that in 2003 the PDP was careless how

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it manipulated the vote tally, while Obi made a careful count and presented it to bolster his court case. The PDP would not repeat the same mistakes this time, Okoni predicted.

The AC Defends Ngige, Warns of Possible Violence

¶12. (C) Poloff met AC officials to discuss their candidate Chris Ngige. Ngige remained under scrutiny by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on charges he stole 3 billion naira as Governor (approximately \$23.4 million). INEC disqualified him on the EFCC charges, and claimed Ngige failed to submit a nomination form and did not attend the verification exercise. Fred Chukwuelobe, Director of Publicity for Ngige, handed Poloff a three-page document claiming Ngige complied with INEC regulations, and the state INEC accepted Ngige's nomination but was overruled by INEC National Chairman Iwu, a close friend of Uba. Chukwuelobe told Poloff that Ngige was in Anambra, though he had not campaigned publicly out of fear of being arrested. (Comment: Ngige is a unique personality and Anambra a unique state. It takes such a unique combination to produce a gubernatorial candidate, who believes he is a fugitive and thus cannot publicly campaign, yet who believes he has a credible claim at victory. End comment)

¶13. (C) AC Chairman Ndubisi Nwobu told Poloff Uba was behind Ngige's disqualification. According to Nwobu, Uba was trying to disqualify all formidable opposition because he would lose an open election. Uba also wants the Anambra governorship to get immunity for himself for misdeeds he committed as the President's most special Special Advisor, Nwobu said. The PDP had already bought off INEC and was trying to bribe anyone they could. However, once Uba has to recoup his expenses, the people would lose, Nwobu predicted. Nwobu said Uba has a checkered personal history, noting that Uba was

supposed to declare \$90,000 worth of goods which he exported from the U.S. Uba failed to declare until he was caught by U.S. Customs.

¶14. (C) All of poloff's contacts said Ngige improved conditions in Anambra during his stint as governor and gained popularity because of his achievements, despite his admission that he obtained office through electoral fraud. Nwobu, expressing confidence in the judiciary, told Poloff that if the PDP manipulated the results the AC would go to the courts for redress. Nwobu said however, that he could not predict the people's reaction to a rigged election. He thought there was a possibility the PDP would use violence to suppress the opposition parties.

Comment

¶15. (C) While our interlocutors had their own biased angles they were playing, what they stated generally fits Post's analysis. The Uba family's meddling in Anambran politics is proverbial. Because he has the force of the federal government, ruling party and national business elite behind him, Uba has the inside track for the election. However, his popular support is neither wide nor deep. INEC has buffeted and thus far disqualified Uba's major opposition. If Obi and Ngige cannot get judicial relief so that they are on the ballot, Uba will certainly win. If they get on the ballot, the question will then become whether they have the wherewithal to force what appears to be a biased INEC to count the vote accurately. End comment.

BROWNE